United Nations A/C.3/53/SR.5

General Assembly
Fifty-third session

Official Records

Distr.: General
1 December 1998
English
Original: French

Third Committee

Summary record of the 5th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 7 October 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Hachani ..... (Tunisia)

Contents

Agenda item 100: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

98-81474 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Agenda Item 100: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/53/3, A/53/63-S/1998/100, A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/95-S/1998/311, A/53/97, A/53/294, A/53/350, A/53/356, A/53/378, A/53/416 and A/53/425)

1. **Mr. Nuanthasing** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that the objectives set at the World Summit for Social Development were far from having been attained despite various efforts undertaken at national, regional and international levels. According to the UNDP Human Development Report for 1998, social problems were most acute in the developing countries. Their solution required concerted and coordinated actions at the national and international levels. In order to attain the objectives embodied in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, social development must be based on sustained economic growth and sustainable development. The Lao People's Democratic Republic had accordingly identified eight national priority programmes, two of which, on human resources development and rural development, were designed to fight the root causes of poverty. The aim was to provide vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized people in rural and remote areas with access to transport, local markets, appropriate technology, microcredits, etc., in order to enhance their social integration and their participation in the development process.

2. The situation of young people in the world continued to be a source of concern, despite the success of the policies and programmes undertaken by many countries. The Lisbon Declaration contained ideas that could be a source of inspiration for national authorities responsible for youth. The Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union was involved actively in the formulation of national youth education, health and employment programmes.

3. The approaching International Year of Older Persons provided an opportunity to discuss the building of a society for all ages. The Lao Government attached great importance to the problems of older persons, and had issued a decree under which it would provide housing or building materials to older persons, especially pensioners.

4. However, the Government lacked resources for implementing its social policy and needed financial and technical assistance from the international community.

5. **Ms. Ghimire** (Nepal) said that the social and economic situation in the world was now grimmer than it had been in the past three decades because of unemployment, social exclusion and disintegration of structures, particularly in developing countries. In a world of plenty, the spectre of war, famine and mass exodus still haunted millions of people. Those scourges all had economic, social, political and cultural dimensions. Only concerted actions at the international level would make it possible to overcome them. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the struggle against poverty should be a priority for the international community, including the United Nations system, the multilateral financial institutions and regional organizations. In that context Nepal welcomed the commitment to reduce world poverty by half by the year 2015, as well as the decision of the General Assembly, at its previous session, to convene the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in the year 2001, and hoped that the Conference would make it possible to reverse the tendency to marginalize the least developed countries and to promote their development.

6. Nepal had spared no effort in mobilizing youth for national development. The World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth had contributed to identifying and broadening the areas of communication and cooperation between the young of different countries.

7. The international community should continue to adopt viable strategies to improve the circumstances of older persons. Nepal had initiated a modest programme of financial support to older persons and the disabled so as to promote social integration and cohesion. Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector must extend unfailing support to the United Nations programmes on ageing in the context of the preparations for the International Year of Older Persons.

8. **Mr. Bocalandro** (Argentina) said that the current critical social situation which was due to unsuitable industrial structures, excessive bureaucracy and structural adjustments had been aggravated by the international financial crisis. It required a new relationship between the State and the individual, who had to play an active part in the taking of decisions which affected his well-being. In the past decade Argentina had undertaken a thorough-going transformation of its economy and a State reform which had enabled it to record strong economic growth as a result of increased participation in economic activity by the private sector, women and other social groups. However, internal and external factors had caused an increase in unemployment. Vulnerability and social exclusion had become the gravest social problems, added to which were the negative effects of globalization. The current financial crisis was one example of that new global reality. It was

therefore necessary to adopt policies of institutional reform and training to prepare people to face up to the new realities of globalization.

9. The demographic situation, market changes, retirement regimes, poverty and the increase in life expectancy required that special attention be given to the question of ageing both at the national and at the international levels. Argentina had initiated a programme for vulnerable groups of the population and a national plan for older persons. Its social policy was aimed at integrating into public structures social activities complementary to those of the private sector. Investing in the human factor was a vital element of that policy.

10. **Mr. Wilmot** (Ghana) said that in spite of the collective commitment made at the World Summit for Social Development, the social situation in the world remained deplorable because of the inequitable international economic system. Debt servicing absorbed resources which the countries of the third world could otherwise have used to finance their social development. His delegation commended the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session on the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action for having included in its work programme consideration of the effects of external debt, globalization and structural adjustment programmes. His delegation also subscribed to the recommendations drawn up by the Commission for Social Development regarding the promotion of social integration.

11. At the national level, the Government of Ghana was promoting social integration and participation of all in the development process through district assemblies which were the bedrock of the country's decentralization system.

12. The efforts being made to promote relationships between the generations and to create opportunities for older persons to participate in socio-economic life contributed to the achievement of the objectives of the World Summit for Social Development. His delegation welcomed the celebration of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, but regretted that the problems of older persons in rural areas which had been deprived of their young people through rural exodus, particularly in the third world, had not been reflected in the preparations for the Year.

13. The social integration of young people and the disabled also deserved special attention. A draft national youth policy giving effect to the recommendations of the Lisbon Declaration had been submitted to the Government.

14. In conclusion, he recalled the need to underline the importance of the family as the fundamental unit of society.

15. **Mr. Calovski** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the United Nations played a role of paramount importance in the efforts that were being made at the international level to support national social policy. Globalization required the adoption of common standards of social development. The severe social crisis that was being experienced in many countries as a result of financial turbulence, the external environment and their inability to eradicate poverty should force the international community to implement the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action more resolutely. The forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development was the right opportunity for that purpose.

16. The transformation of the political and economic system had created various social problems, but the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had managed to continue its social development, without major crises, and in particular to reduce unemployment and concentrate efforts on social protection, with the cooperation of the international community, particularly UNICEF.

17. The recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General on preparations for the International Year of Older Persons (A/53/294) would help promote the concept of "a society for all ages" in which older persons played an important role in the education and advancement of the family. He stressed the importance of the Lisbon Declaration, and of the Action Plan adopted at the Third World Youth Forum, which aimed to encourage the participation of young people in the development of society.

18. Measures also needed to be taken at the national and international levels for the benefit of the disabled so as to help them participate in productive and useful activities in society.

19. Since it was impossible to consider social development separately from economic, political and cultural development, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had set itself the goal of successful integration into the common European social system.

20. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that the issues considered at the World Summit for Social Development were more topical than ever because the disparities between countries and between population groups had been exacerbated by the effects of the deterioration of the terms of trade, indebtedness, the decline in official development assistance and the malfunctioning of the international economic system, which had been aggravated by unbridled globalization, as the dramatic Asian crisis had demonstrated. Once considered an engine of prosperity, globalization was proving to be a

factor of impoverishment and exclusion which called for a coordinated response by the international financial institutions, supported by the United Nations.

21. Economic development must be accompanied by social development and respond first of all to the needs of the family, but also to those of young people and older persons. That was why, since gaining independence, Algeria had placed the social dimension at the heart of its development policy, based on the promotion of the principles of social justice, national solidarity and the preservation of entitlements. Algeria attached great importance to the family as was demonstrated by the establishment of a ministry for national solidarity and the family and a national committee for the preservation and promotion of the family which was responsible for promoting information programmes, community activities, special programmes for disadvantaged social categories and solidarity measures.

22. The public authorities were particularly sensitive to the problems of youth, which represented 70 per cent of the population: education and training programmes absorbed one third of the State budget. Schooling was free and compulsory, and medicine was free. Measures had been taken to promote the employment of young people.

23. The protection of the disabled and of older persons was guaranteed under the Constitution. In order to implement that provision, his Government had adopted a programme designed to expand employment opportunities and ensure equality of opportunity as well as access to rehabilitation and other services.

24. With regard to older persons, the Constitution placed an obligation on children to help their parents. In addition to health care and retirement facilities, older persons received social assistance (allowances or services in specialized institutions).

25. Algeria planned to celebrate the International Year of Older Persons by establishing a broad intersectoral programme including seminars, study sessions and symposiums, meetings between young people and older persons, debates with the press, the formulation of a strategy for communication on the pathologies of the third age and intergenerational links, the study of a specific law on the protection of older persons, the establishment of a data bank and the production of a poster.

26. **Mr. Seksenbayev** (Kazakhstan) said that Kazakhstan's social policy needed to be seen within the context of the profound changes which had taken place in the context of the democratization of Kazakh society. Social problems must be seen within the context of economic development and sustainable human development, and of the economic and social situation in the world. His Government, on the basis of the decisions adopted at the World Summit for Social Development and other international conferences, was implementing a series of economic and social measures aimed particularly at young people, older persons, the disabled and the family.

27. His delegation welcomed the decision to proclaim 1999 the International Year of Older Persons. It welcomed the new approaches to the problem of ageing and the desire to improve the situation of older persons, and thereby contribute to achieving the objective of the Year: "Towards a society for all ages". During the Year, the international community must strive to find specific means of attaining that objective.

28. A preparatory committee had been established in the context of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with a view to celebrating the Year. Kazakhstan had drawn up a programme envisaging, *inter alia*, a set of measures to assist older persons living alone who were not able to work. National commissions had been established for that purpose, the financing modalities for the programme had been established, and a benevolent fund was to be set up for the most disadvantaged older persons.

29. His Government felt that, despite practical difficulties, it was essential to protect the rights of the most disadvantaged groups, particularly the disabled, who, moreover, were mostly older persons. To that end, priority action must be defined, on the basis of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The decision adopted on 15 June 1993 by the President of Kazakhstan to proclaim the second Sunday of October each year the national day for the disabled demonstrated the importance which Kazakhstan attached to that question. One of the priority objectives was to integrate the disabled into productive activities. It was also important to ensure their access to education, culture, leisure, sports activities, employment and transportation, and to establish rehabilitation centres. It had to be recognized that a number of economic difficulties were preventing Kazakhstan from adopting the legislative provisions necessary to enable the disabled to have unrestricted access to the social infrastructure.

30. One of the significant events of 1998 was the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, organized by the Government of Portugal in cooperation with the United Nations. The Conference had made it possible to take up a number of questions relating to youth, draw up new guidelines and strengthen cooperation between Governments

and all the other actors working to help youth in the world. The adoption of the Lisbon Declaration and the Braga Youth Action Plan was also a step in the right direction.

31. His delegation drew attention to the need to offer young people more employment and training opportunities, since lack of education was one of the main factors hindering social development. The establishment of conditions to enable young people to receive high quality education, the development of small businesses and the emergence of the middle class, which would be formed from today's youth, were among the priorities of the development strategy to the year 2030 drawn up by his Government. Lastly, his delegation reaffirmed its desire to cooperate with all the parties concerned to achieve the objectives of the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth and the International Year of Older Persons.

32. **Mr. Danesh-Yazdi** (Islamic Republic of Iran), stressing that the Third Committee should attach greater importance to the social crisis arising from the deteriorating economic situation in many countries, said that the family was the basic unit of society and, as such, should be supported at both the national and the international level. To that end, therefore, the Secretary-General should strengthen the capacity of the Questions on the Family unit of the Secretariat.

33. His Government welcomed the decision to designate 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. In his country, the Welfare Organization provided special assistance to older persons in need. As Iran was an Islamic country, older persons held a place of honour in society and were treated with compassion and humanity, values for which scientific and technical progress could not substitute.

34. On the threshold of the twenty-first century, young people had a vital role to play, and all issues relating to them must be addressed in an international context. The Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes and the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond were very useful in that regard. His Government, mindful of the need for educated, informed, creative and healthy young people capable of participating in the formulation of development plans, decision-making processes and the preservation of peace, had established a Supreme Council of Youth, implemented a National Youth Policy and promoted education.

35. Stress should be laid on the threat which drug abuse posed to the entire international community. No single Government could combat the drug menace alone; only concerted efforts could achieve results. The United Nations should coordinate those efforts.

36. His Government stood ready to cooperate with the international community in all fields related to social development; it was actively involved in the preparatory process for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development.

37. **Ms. Bennani** (Morocco) said her delegation was convinced that social development must be based on the promotion of human rights, non-discrimination, equality of opportunity, social justice and respect for diversity. Her Government was thus endeavouring, in collaboration with civil society and taking advantage of economic growth, to ensure the social integration of disabled and elderly persons, the protection of children and the promotion of fundamental rights. It had drawn up a five-year social adjustment plan targeting those who had failed to benefit from growth, namely, the rural and disadvantaged populations, and had implemented policies to encourage the establishment of small enterprises that could partially resolve the employment crisis and alleviate poverty.

38. On the threshold of the new millennium, young people must be able to meet the challenges of globalization, economic liberalization and the revolution in communications; her Government had taken a number of initiatives on behalf of youth, namely, development of the youth movement, creation of the National Council for Youth and the Future, establishment of an employment promotion programme for young graduates, improvement of living conditions for young people and measures to combat their exclusion, adoption of policies to promote the creation of youth enterprises, participation in the drafting of the Lisbon Declaration, and so on.

39. Population ageing constituted another challenge. The economic and social protection and the specific rights and needs of elderly persons, particularly women, were pressing questions. The International Year of Older Persons should make it possible to adopt concrete measures to promote their integration and participation. For its part, her Government had drawn up an action programme based on the strengthening of family ties.

40. The report of the Secretary-General on preparations for the International Year to be held in 1999 (A/53/294), which recommended, *inter alia*, the elimination of stereotyping and the utilization of the experience of elderly persons, fully reflected her Government's views.

41. **Mr. Suh Dae-Won** (Republic of Korea) said that the recommendations contained in the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted by the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, could be the basis for national strategies to

protect elderly persons. The 18 United Nations Principles for Older Persons, adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session, also provided useful guidance.

42. With regard to the International Year of Older Persons (A/53/294), his Government wished to state that it did not regard older persons as a social burden. While it was true that population ageing had a negative socio-economic impact, it was also true that older persons had experience and knowledge to their credit that could benefit other population groups. In order to facilitate the continued employment of older persons, Governments must subsidize companies which agreed to employ them for their loss of earnings. A law to that effect had already been promulgated in his country. Secondly, efforts to promote the well-being of older people had fallen short of their goals. Accordingly, there was a need to adopt a more comprehensive and integrated approach aimed at cultivating individual potential throughout an entire lifespan. Thirdly, older women must be empowered; to that end, women must take their rightful place in society from the earliest possible age.

43. The Commission for Social Development had decided at its thirty-sixth session to request the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to explore with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) the feasibility of including an ageing-related development index in the Human Development Report. Given the success of the Human Development Index and the Gender Development Index, his delegation supported that initiative, which it believed would attract attention from Governments and the media to issues of ageing. His delegation requested the Secretariat to keep the Committee informed of new developments in that area.

44. Despite the current economic difficulties, his Government continued to focus on the problems of the elderly. It had established a Preparatory Committee for the International Year of Older Persons and a focal point within the Ministry of Health and Welfare. It also welcomed the adoption on 1 October 1998 of the Macau Declaration and Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific, as well as the active involvement of non-governmental organizations in the preparations for the International Year.

45. Older persons represented the collective memory of the twentieth century; they were a repository of knowledge and competence to be transmitted to future generations. It was incumbent upon the States Members of the United Nations to ensure that such valuable human resources were not wasted.

46. **Ms. Al-Hamami** (Yemen) said that the item under consideration concerned problems faced by all societies, in both developed and developing countries. Accordingly, there was a need to establish comparable standards and to promote cooperation between the international community, United Nations programmes and global populations with a view to implementing mechanisms suited to the characteristics of various societies.

47. Like other developing countries, Yemen had only limited means. In the social sphere, her Government had adopted measures on behalf of children and the family: the creation of a Department of Social Development within the Ministry of Development in 1990, the institution of a social welfare system and the setting up of a social development and employment fund and a small-enterprise promotion service in 1997. The authorities were thus assisting the population, particularly the elderly, disabled persons and children, to improve their living conditions.

48. Her country, which suffered from poverty and unemployment, had developed a national strategy centred on three major themes: job creation, particularly for the most disadvantaged; strengthening of the social welfare system; and strengthening of the social development and employment fund and the small-enterprise promotion service.

49. The Republic of Yemen was currently carrying out financial and administrative reforms in order to further social development, particularly among the poor, the disabled, older persons and orphans. It sought to help large, low-income families by expanding productive activities and investment projects.

50. Despite the economic difficulties and the scarce resources, the local population came to the aid of disadvantaged groups and was undertaking many sizeable projects funded in part by non-governmental organizations, international organizations and friendly countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and Japan.

51. The Government of Yemen endorsed the Secretary-General's statements in paragraph 77 of his report (A/53/294), to the effect that a society for all ages must be promoted by emphasizing the interdependence of the life stages, the inter-connectedness of generations and the interdependence of individuals and society. That strategy was compatible with the Shariah, which advocated solidarity within society, mutual respect within families, obedience to adults and especially older adults, and care for children and the disabled. Yemeni society, like other Muslim societies, applied those principles and gave particular attention to older persons, who stayed with their families until they died.

52. On the occasion of the preparations for the International Year of Older Persons, which would be

observed beginning in October 1999, Yemen hoped that the international community would do everything possible to enable the elderly to participate in economic, social and cultural rights. Older persons, children and the disabled had to be helped, particularly those under occupation or sanctions and prey to disease, hunger or natural disasters.

53. **Ms. Kimlíková** (Slovakia) commended the Secretary-General for his report on the preparations for the International Year of Older Persons (A/53/294). She found the section on networking, research and information exchange (sect. IV.D, pp. 16–18) particularly interesting.

54. Her Government had in 1998 discussed a report on social security and health protection for older persons. The ageing of the population as a result of a low birth rate or longer life expectancy or both had a considerable economic and social impact, especially on the labour force, pension systems, intergenerational solidarity, health services and public services in general. Slovakia was seeking to move away from State paternalism to a fair society for all and to promote the social and economic rights of its citizens, especially the elderly. Its main aim was to have them keep their self-sufficiency and dignity and allow them to remain as long as possible in their own families and communities.

55. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/80, her Government had established a coordinating centre for the preparation of the International Year of Older Persons and, at the local level, working groups for the same purpose. The activities being carried out were based on United Nations principles and focused on education, media policy, publicity, science, research and social and economic conditions. The Slovak institutions dealing with older persons were intensifying their cooperation with comparable institutions in other European countries.

56. In a "society for all ages", young people clearly also had a role to play. The world's youth made up approximately one fifth of the population and it was essential to invest in youth in order to sustain economic development. Slovakia's policy was to promote the independence of young people, their sense of responsibility and their readiness to participate in the life of society, and there were currently about 300 associations in the country working with young people and children.

57. Slovakia welcomed the first World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth and its Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, which offered a good basis for action on behalf of young people. It also welcomed the plan to hold a special session of the General Assembly in Geneva in the year 2000, devoted to implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development.

58. **Mr. Ahmad** (Malaysia), referring to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action for Social Development, said that his Government's five-year plan allocated 29.3 per cent of public expenditure to the social sector, to fund measures and programmes in keeping with the focus of the World Summit. A social action master plan had been put in place.

59. The percentage of the Malaysian population living in absolute poverty had dropped from 60 per cent in 1970 to 13.5 per cent in 1990, and the target was to bring it down to 5.5 per cent in the year 2000. Malaysia attached great importance to the Lisbon Declaration and was committed to ensuring that the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond adopted by the General Assembly in 1995 was fully implemented.

60. New approaches were required in developing youth programmes to allow young people to acquire the skills required by the fast pace of economic and technological development and to contribute to nation-building. That was one of the objectives of the seventh five-year plan, which also put emphasis on the inculcation of moral and spiritual values among young people. Believing that the active participation of young people in sports and cultural activities could help reduce the social problems, Malaysia had hosted the Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur.

61. Malaysia saw the family as the basic unit of society and recognized the increased demands that modernization made on families. It had therefore established a national high-level inter-agency committee to address social problems, starting at the level of the family. It would continue to implement various family development programmes. It believed that women must acquire the necessary skills in that connection, and had begun to educate the public on the need for men and women to share family responsibilities.

62. Ageing was an issue for all countries. The observance in 1999 of the International Year of Older Persons, with the theme "Towards a society for all ages" would give the international community an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to the International Plan of Action on Ageing. In Malaysia, preparation for ageing was an integral part of the social and economic development policies. Tax relief was provided to help keep older people in their families, and there were homes for indigent older persons without families. Malaysia had helped to set up or rebuild four retirement homes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

63. Malaysia was also engaged in integrating the disabled into society by providing education, training and rehabilitation programmes and offering them the technical

training that would help them to gain economic independence. It encouraged non-governmental organizations to provide social services to the disabled.

64. Only through genuine partnership and cooperation between national Governments, the international community and non-governmental organizations could the issues relating to youth, the family, older persons and the disabled be successfully addressed.

65. **Mr. Tabone** (Malta) said that not only must the rights of the older generation be safeguarded but it must be allowed to play its role within society. Older persons deserve respect and love.

66. In Malta, the Department for the Elderly, under the Ministry of Social Policy, paid special attention to them. It sought to improve their health, allow them to continue living at home as long as possible or, failing that, in appropriate institutions, and to help them to remain active. Malta had also set up a very popular university for senior citizens. His Government was currently discussing with trade unions and the private sector a reform of the pension system. The plan was to introduce a parallel system of private pension schemes alongside the State system.

67. Malta's International Institute on Ageing, to which the Government had contributed over $250,000 a year and which was governed by an agreement between the United Nations and Malta (Economic and Social Council resolution 1987/41), was doing remarkable work. It served as a bridge for the collection, exchange and dissemination of information on ageing and encouraged network-building and the establishment of focal points for training needs in connection with ageing. Since more and more countries, particularly developing countries, were witnessing an ageing of the population, training was of paramount importance. Working together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Institute had over the past 10 years offered courses in demography, health care, income security and social gerontology and soon hoped to use distance-learning technologies. The United Nations should consider granting a more formal status to the Institute.

68. Malta was also providing for its disabled population and had just submitted a bill to improve the living conditions of the disabled. The proposed legislation sought to eliminate discrimination against them and to create public awareness that the disabled are entitled to dignity and had to be treated on an equal footing with other citizens and be allowed to participate in the life of the community.

69. Governments should treat all citizens impartially and fairly and provide benefits and assistance to those who really needed them. They should also do more to improve occupational health and the quality of social services.

70. **Ms. Banerjee** (India) said that India attached particular importance to the theme of the International Year of Older Persons: towards a society for all ages. While age categorizations were necessary for statistical and planning purposes, the concerns of older persons and of young people should be addressed in the context of a society for all ages. While the Lisbon Declaration was to be commended for identifying the full participation of youth in decision-making and in the life of society as a priority, the problem of youth unemployment required urgent attention, particularly since the deliberations of the World Bank painted such a gloomy picture of the world economy. Youth unemployment, which often led to alienation, violence and terrorism, posed a major challenge to social integration. The problem had become all the more intractable as a result of demographic ageing, which had led the Indian Government to raise the retirement age for civil servants from 58 to 60. Such decisions to extend the working lives of older persons should not, however, result in "generational war". Both young people and older persons could find employment opportunities in the informal sector, which was not constrained by the laws governing the retirement age. Her delegation proposed that the follow-up to the Social Summit should focus on youth unemployment, an issue made all the more urgent by the prevailing social and economic climate, particularly in developing countries.

71. Referring to the important points which emerged from the report of the Secretary-General on preparations for the International Year of Older Persons, she said that her delegation was particularly pleased to note that the Secretary-General had given priority to promoting investments in human development and to the concept of "a society for all ages".

72. Although attitudes towards older persons varied, comprehensive multilateral action was required. The current Prime Minister of India, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, had noted that demographic ageing was unlikely to be confined to his country. The increase in life expectancy in most countries necessitated programmes and activities for which the United Nations could offer inspiration. However, it was important to remember, as had been highlighted in the 1997 Report on the World Social Situation, that there were many countries where life expectancy had actually fallen, principally as a result of AIDS and war. It was important to strike a balance between meeting the needs of those blessed with a longer life and the needs of those who had no guarantee of reaching adulthood. Age was neither a reward nor a liability, but part

of the larger freedom which the Charter of the United Nations pledged to the peoples of the world.

73. **Mr. Gubarevich** (Belarus) said that, at a time of world upheaval, marked by political and economic crises, social development was an issue of growing importance. Concerted action was required at the national and international levels to guarantee social equity, the elimination of all forms of discrimination and productive and equitably remunerated employment for all. One of the main objectives of his Government's current social policy was to safeguard the welfare of each employable citizen and his family, while improving the level of social assistance provided to the most vulnerable groups in the population. The objective was to move from a system of social dependency to a system of social guarantees.

74. Since achieving independence, Belarus had reformed its social welfare system. Its Parliament had adopted over a dozen laws on social affairs, particularly in the areas of employment, social welfare for disabled persons and social security benefits. The State had adopted and implemented an assistance programme for families, persons unable to work, disabled persons, war veterans, victims of the Chernobyl disaster and various vulnerable groups. It had also established a policy on youth that included employment and accommodation programmes. All of those activities included a gender perspective.

75. His delegation, which accorded particular attention to the situation of older persons, welcomed the recent declaration of the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. The situation of older persons was a good indicator of a country's health. Belarus had adopted a plan to mark the Year and had designed a major programme to address the problems of older persons. Further, it had amended a number of legal provisions relating to war veterans and to institutions for older persons and the disabled. Belarus was also working to find the financial resources to reform the pensions system.

76. The results of international activities in the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development had shown that Governments, international organizations and civil society still had a long way to go. His delegation welcomed the strengthening of the role of the Economic and Social Council and of the Commission for Social Development in the coordination of the activities of the United Nations system in the social domain. It welcomed the successful outcome of the thirty-sixth session of the Commission for Social Development and, in particular, supported the agreed conclusions on the promotion of social integration and the participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons. Those conclusions would help to guide national efforts and international cooperation to promote social integration and welfare and to combat violence, crime, drugs and other phenomena which destroyed the fabric of society. His delegation was pleased to note that the agreed conclusions called on the international community to support reforms under way in countries in transition.

77. His delegation supported the decision to convene a special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000 devoted to an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21. That evaluation should provide a new impetus to the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and help to promote new initiatives. Belarus would participate actively in preparations for the special session.

78. His delegation was convinced that the struggle to overcome alienation, poverty and unemployment and to offer protection to vulnerable groups would be a long one. Innovative national and international action was required to resolve those problems. The technical and political resources already existed. What was required now was action.

79. **Ms. Hadar** (Israel) said that the right to participate as a full member of society was fundamental to the human condition and should not be denied to those who could not exercise that right without assistance. The law was the sole safeguard for people with disabilities. Israel had recently promulgated a law on equal rights for disabled persons, guaranteeing them the opportunity to live in dignity and freedom and to participate actively in all spheres of life, so that they might realize their full potential.

80. Commitment to such values ran deep in the history, heritage and culture of Israel. The State of Israel had been founded on the idea that man was created in the divine image. It was determined to reflect that principle, which was embedded in its most ancient texts, in its own society and laws.

81. Unfortunately, at present, over 10 per cent of Israelis lived with disabilities and 70 per cent of those with severe disabilities were unemployed. Out of 7,100 Israelis suffering from intellectual retardation who lived away from home, some 5,700 were institutionalized.

82. The law on equal rights for people with disabilities would help to correct the discrimination of the past. It clearly stated that affirmative action taken for that purpose did not constitute discrimination and guaranteed people with disabilities access to public services and facilities. The law prohibited discrimination in employment and working

conditions and required employers to take measures to allow people with disabilities to be adequately represented. By law, job advertisements could contain no conditions of a discriminatory nature, while the Labour Court had jurisdiction over cases involving infringement of the rights of disabled persons. In addition to legislation, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was planning to launch a series of programmes aimed at employing or rehabilitating disabled persons.

83. As a result of all those efforts, Israel might become not only the land of milk and honey, but also a nation in which as yet untapped human potential could reach its full expression.

84. **Mr. Freire** (Portugal) associated himself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union. He thanked the States Members of the United Nations for the support they had given to the initiative of the Portuguese Government in organizing the Lisbon World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, which had been a successful experiment in partnership between the Portuguese Government and the United Nations.

85. The World Conference had been a direct response to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond which, in its paragraph 123, underlined the importance of international meetings under the aegis of the United Nations. It had provided an opportunity for exchanges of views and experience in searching for new solutions to youth problems. However, the Conference had not been an end in itself but a means of promoting implementation of the Programme of Action for Youth and, even if it was still premature to undertake an evaluation of its outcome, it already seemed that in that respect it had been a success. Portugal proposed that at the next session of the Commission for Social Development, in February 1999, a panel of experts be established as a follow-up measure. Portugal was convinced that in the coming year important decisions would be taken on the role to be assumed by the United Nations in follow-up of the recommendations and commitments adopted in Lisbon.

86. **Mr. Rim Yong Chol** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that despite the efforts of the international community, which, on the occasion of the World Summit for Social Development and the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, had pledged to accelerate social integration and the struggle against poverty and unemployment, it had to be acknowledged that those problems, as well as those of disease, illiteracy and crime in its various forms, remained very serious. According to recent United Nations statistics, 1.3 billion people, one fifth of the world's population, were living in extreme poverty and 800 million had no access to basic health care.

87. Achieving the objective of social development meant getting rid of all forms of social inequalities and evils so as to enable all people to lead an independent and creative life with equal rights, and in particular to enjoy the right to stable employment and to benefit from social services such as health, education and training, so that everyone could be a genuine and full member of society. One condition for achieving that objective was the establishment and implementation of judicious and participatory national policies which reflected the needs of the popular masses.

88. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had always accorded particular attention to social development: it devoted itself to guaranteeing everyone a job, as well as free medical care and education. As a result of that policy, the people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, including the younger generation, were leading stable and happy lives like a large family, in spite of the economic blockade imposed by external forces and the temporary difficulties caused by the natural disasters which had struck the country on a number of occasions in the past few years.

89. One of the most important means of accelerating social development was the strengthening of international cooperation, particularly with organizations of the United Nations system. In that connection, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea appreciated the assistance given to Member States by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization in the areas of health and education. However, the international financial bodies should increase their financial and technical assistance to the developing countries.

90. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea unreservedly supported the proposal to hold a special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000 which would be devoted to an overall consideration and evaluation of the implementation of Agenda 21.

91. **Ms. Mpe** (Botswana) said that 70 per cent of Botswana's population was under the age of 29, and more than one third was between 12 and 29 years of age. In view of their numbers and their special problems, it was essential to make greater efforts on behalf of young people so that they were able to contribute more to the future development of the country.

92. In 1996 Botswana had adopted a national youth policy, and it was currently preparing a national action plan. The youth empowerment strategy was part of a broader initiative on citizen empowerment and community development, which was reflected in a number of policy statements on education and youth.

93. The youth empowerment policy was based on recognition that young people suffered the most from unemployment, poor health services and HIV/AIDS, due to the fact that they lacked information and skills. Youth empowerment was essential because the youth of today were the leaders of tomorrow, and would be shaping the society that would be inherited by succeeding generations.

94. In conclusion, she invited the international community to subscribe to the Lisbon Declaration.

95. **Mr. Boisson** (Monaco) said that at the express request of the Sovereign Prince a home care service for persons over the age of 70 had been instituted on the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons. The service provided home care which was in addition to the financial benefits.

96. The Health and Social Action Directorate had been given responsibility for coordinating the celebration of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 and drawing up a programme on the theme of "Towards a society for all ages" in cooperation with the Directorate of National Education, Youth and Sport, the Directorate of Cultural Affairs and NGOs.

97. Various activities were planned for older persons for the year 1999: lectures, sporting events, visits to various places in the Principality and competitions in educational establishments to enhance awareness of the theme of the International Year. Older persons themselves would be consulted about the measures that were needed to improve their circumstances. The Monaco authorities had always been anxious to improve the living environment of the population, and particularly the elderly. In addition, there was a plan to consult the elderly with a view to securing greater benefit from their experience and abilities. They might, for example, be given a greater role in promoting the use of the Monegasque language. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particular emphasis had been placed on article 27, which guaranteed to everyone the right to participate in cultural life: too often the elderly were excluded from that right, and the International Year of Older Persons should be seen as an opportunity to promote its application on their behalf.

98. It was not enough merely to improve the living conditions of older persons; they should also be given the wherewithal to remain active and to contribute to the progress of society, to which they had much to bring. Only by adopting that approach would it be possible to build a "society for all ages".

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.